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Approved For Release 2005/06/06 : CIA-RDP75B00380R000300050010-7

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Cuba Trains S. Yemen Pilots

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Cuba has begun training pilots for Marxist-oriented South Yemen to fly the advanced Mig-21 jet fighters the Soviet Union is now supplying to the Yemenis, according to well-informed Washington sources.

There are more than 100 Cubans in South Yemen, many of them military advisers training the South Yemeni militia and air force, the sources say. An unspecified number of Yemeni pilots have also gone to Cuba for training.

The arrival of Cuban military advisers, in large numbers in South Yemen, the only

leftist regime on the Arabian peninsula, which contains the world's largest oil reserves, appears to be linked to a step-up in the delivery of Soviet aircraft and other arms to the country.

Strategically located at the Red Sea's entrance, South Yemen, whose capital Aden was a former British crown colony, has provided the Soviets with their only foothold on the Arabian peninsula.

The military buildup there has become a major concern not only of U.S. officials but also of North Yemen and Saudi Arabia, which have turned to the West for diplo-

matic support and increased military assistance.

The presence of Cuban pilots there has led to speculation that Cubans may have been the unidentified foreigners who flew two South Yemeni Migs in an attack on a Saudi Arabian border post in late March.

That attack and the Saudi realization that the South Yemenis are obtaining Mig-21s are understood to have triggered the Saudi decision to procure either Phantom fighter-bombers from the United States or advanced Mi-

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... from France to the Soviet craft.

While the Soviets are supplying South Yemen and Iraq with more than \$1 billion in military hardware, the United States has decided to sell massive amounts of arms and aircraft to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

The prospective and ongoing U.S. arms deals with these three oil-rich Persian Gulf states total about \$3 billion, including training and service contracts.

The Soviet-American rivalry in the Gulf is serving to aggravate the numerous existing intra-Arab conflicts.

Assistant Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco told a Congressional committee recently, without going into further details, that the Mig-21s were about to become operational in South Yemen.

Sisco said that the Saudis want a credible second-strike capability against Mig-21s attacking them from Iraq or South Yemen.

Sources here said the Soviet arms buildup in South Yemen began late last year, about when North and South Yemen ended a two-month spate of border fighting by agreeing to a declaration of the two countries.

The precise number of Mig-21s going to South Yemen is unclear. One analyst said that between 20 and 30 were involved, but others say this number is far too high, although they concede the Yemenis might eventually get that many.

The deliveries are said to be continuing, and the total number of Migs, including earlier model ones, in Yemeni hands is said to total around 60.

South Yemen is the only Arab country where the Cubans are actively involved in a military assistance program and in backing guerrillas to overthrow a conservative regime. Cuban advisers in South Yemen are training commandos fighting in Dhofar, the western province of neighboring Oman, to overthrow the sultan there. In Africa, the Cubans have trained anti-Portuguese guerrillas at camps in Guinea.

Cuban involvement in South Yemen goes back many years and stems primarily from the two governments' similar commitments to socialist revolution based on the peasantry.

The Cubans provided a few advisers to the National Liberation Front, the ruling party in South Yemen, even before the country's independence in 1967, and this continued afterwards.

A strengthening of the Cuban-Yemeni relationship came last November, according to Washington sources, when the NLF secretary general Abdel Fattah Ismail, visited Cuba and apparently arranged for a large Cuban military mission to help both in upgrading South Yemen's 5,000-man people's militia and in training Mig pilots.

Cubans may have flown the two South Yemeni Migs which attacked the Saudi border

post of Al Wadia March 22, although sources here note that Pakistani mercenaries also fly South Yemeni aircraft and Soviet military advisers are stationed in the country. However, it is regarded as unlikely that Soviets would have piloted the planes, which sources here say were Mig-15s or Mig-17s.

The military buildup has put a scare in the North Yemeni government, which has obsolete Soviet aircraft, none of which is now operational according to sources here.

So, North Yemen is pressing the U.S. government for military assistance. It reestablished diplomatic ties with Washington last year, after breaking them over the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

The Soviet Union was once the principal backer of both Yemens, but it cut off most of its aid to the North during last year's border fighting and has since sided increasingly with the South.

The two countries, both separately poor without petroleum resources, committed themselves to a unity agreement last November which neither side shows signs of wanting to implement.

In fact, relations between the two Yemens have become extremely tense since the May 30 assassination in Taiz of Sheikh Mohammed Ali Osman, a member of the three-man Presidential Council that rules North Yemen.

North Yemen charged that his assassins were South Yemeni infiltrators. Yesterday, it announced the killing of three "saboteurs" from the South, raising the total number of alleged South Yemeni agents executed or killed in action to 16 in the past five weeks.

The Marxist regime in the South, with a population of only about 1.5 million compared to the North's estimated 5 million, fears being absorbed by the far more conservative North Yemeni government, with Saudi backing.

This is believed to be the main reason for the South's current military buildup.